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In an attempt to give college seniors sufficient experience to prepare them for the difficulties of their initial teaching assignments in disadvantaged neighborhoods, the Triplet Project was created by Hunter College of the City University of N.Y. A college supervisor and 12 student teachers are assigned to each of two "triplets" (groups of three participating elementary schools within a block or two from each other--one in East Harlem and one in the East Bronx). Since the supervisor functions as a resident in the schools, he is able to observe each of his students (four in each school) 15 times a semester and to have conferences with him immediately after a lesson. He becomes well known in the schools, "a part of the woodwork," so that his presence in the classroom does not create an unrealistic situation. He tailors appropriate experiences for student teachers and sometimes does demonstration teaching. Each student teacher has two 9-week placements, one in the first to third grades and one in the fourth to sixth. He teaches at least one lesson a day for three weeks, two consecutive lessons for two weeks, and later teaches for an entire morning on several occasions. The Triplet Project has now come full circle in that some of the outstanding initial student teachers are now cooperating teachers. When school principals were asked to compare the performance of Triplet Project regular teachers in their schools with other beginning teachers who had had student teaching experience, 50 per cent were rated above average and 40 per cent excellent. (JS)

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An Intensive Elementary School Student-Teaching Program in a Disadvantaged Neighborhood

by
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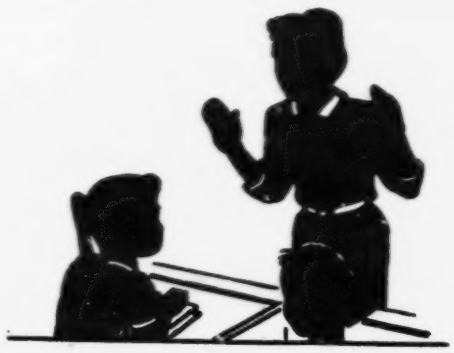

● In the New York City public school system, approximately eight out of ten beginning elementary school teachers are placed in difficult schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods. They are often given some of the more demanding assignments in these schools. For the beginning teacher who has had one semester of student teaching, some 300 hours in the classroom, with generally only four observations by a college supervisor, the confrontation with an elementary class in a disadvantaged neighborhood can be truly traumatic. Within an hour, a day, or a week she can be reduced to tears and ineffectiveness.

In an attempt to give college seniors sufficient experience to prepare them adequately for the difficulties of their initial teaching assignment, "The Triplet Project" was created by Hunter College of the City University of New York. A chief characteristic of the Triplet Project is that each student teacher experiences as many of the realities of teaching disadvantaged children as is possible in one college semester's time. The "Triplet" refers to a group of of three participating elementary schools located within a block or two from each other. One Triplet group is in East Harlem, the other in the East Bronx. The Triplet located in East or Spanish Harlem, a ten minute subway ride away from the Hunter College Park Avenue Campus, is the one described in this article. The majority of the student teachers in the Triplet Project are volunteers. The academic records of these volunteers do not differ significantly from those of a typical group of student teachers.

● The college supervisor in the Triplet Project functions as a resident. He is in the schools nearly every morning and occasionally in the afternoons. This routine enables the supervisor to observe each of his twelve students, four in each of the schools, fifteen times each semester. This contrasts with the four observations given most student teachers outside the Project. As a result of the intensive observation of students, the supervisor can recommend to the principals which student teachers should be appointed to the school. The Triplet Project thus serves as an aid in teacher selection.

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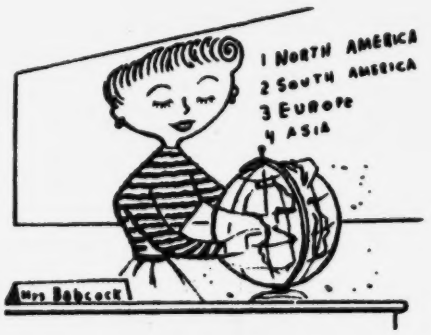
● Because the supervisor spends the entire morning in the school, he can have a conference with the student teacher immediately after she has completed her lesson, while the details are still fresh in everyone's mind. The supervisor has become so well known in the schools that his presence in the classrooms does not act as a deterrent to misbehavior on the part of the children. This is of special importance when the cooperating teacher is out of the room during the observation. Because the children do not look upon the supervisor as someone special, someone who will discipline or report them, they behave normally, creating a realistic classroom situation. Having become "part of the woodwork," the supervisor can sit at the front of the room near the door, observing individual children's behavior during crucial points in the lesson, without distracting the class. At times, the supervisor does demonstration teaching at the conclusion of the lesson to determine whether the children achieved the aim of the lesson. Demonstrations also serve to illustrate a certain approach to a topic, or techniques that might better provide for individual differences.

● Since the Triplet Project attempts to provide a range of classroom experiences, the student teacher has two grade placements, one in the first through third grade range and the other in the fourth through sixth grade. Each placement is of an eight or nine week duration. The student begins teaching no later than the second week and is required to teach at least one lesson a day for three weeks. In the fifth and sixth weeks, she teaches at least two consecutive lessons. During the seventh and eighth weeks, she must teach for an entire morning on several occasions.

● Frequent observations enable the supervisor to tailor appropriate experiences for the student teacher. The teacher who loses the class by taking too long to get to the aim of the lesson has a follow-up lesson the day after her conference with the cooperating teacher and the college supervisor. One student teacher taught reading lessons four consecutive days, under observation, until she was able to shift smoothly from one reading group to the other without unduly extending the lesson. Such detailed and lengthy experiences are not uncommon in the Triplet Project, but they rarely occur in the typical student teacher's experience outside the Project.

● The cooperating teacher and the college supervisor try to enable the student teacher to learn in a trial situation why a class gets restless during long lessons, why unifying written activities are necessary, and why excessive permissiveness in the early stages of the morning can help to create chaos by 11 a.m.



● The core of the program is the development of the student teacher to the stage where she teaches the class for an entire morning. Instead of one isolated lesson, she has the responsibility for the opening exercises, several lessons, transitions between lessons, and lunch time dismissal. She handles all administrative details, including dealing with monitors or visiting parents. She must think on her feet and make

necessary adjustments during the morning in the sequence and scope of the lessons that she has planned to best accommodate the attention spans of the children.

- These baptisms under fire may reduce the student teacher to tears. She is generally disappointed in her performance. The supervisor here steps in as counselor. He helps the student to realize that these experiences are a trial run, designed to teach her to cope with the class problems that will arise when she becomes a professional. In the Triplet Project, guided by both the cooperating teacher and the supervisor, the student has the opportunity to learn from her mistakes. The Project also helps the student to reappraise herself regarding her ability to teach disadvantaged children. Some realize they would be happier and more effective teaching other types of children.

- The Triplet Project has now come full cycle in that some of the outstanding initial Triplet Project student teachers are now cooperating teachers. This helps to create a good atmosphere for the program. Periodic after-school conferences are held with the cooperating teachers to discuss policy matters. Paying these teachers for their attendance at these conferences is one way in which Hunter College shows its appreciation for the extensive effort these teachers have given to the Project.

- Triplet Project school principals were asked to compare the performance of Triplet Project regular teachers in their schools with other beginning teachers they have known who have had student teaching experience. On a five point scale, approximately 10 per cent of the Project teachers were rated "3-generally satisfactory in her present position"; about 50 per cent of the teachers were rated "4-performance is above average"; and about 40 per cent were rated "5-doing extremely well, would almost suspect that she had considerably more experience."

- One outgrowth of the Project has been a Hunter College graduate course, "Problems in Elementary Education," given in one of the Triplet schools to a small group of beginning teachers who had been students in the Triplet Project. Through this course, the same supervisor notes the progress of his former Project students, and as part of the course observes and teaches with the teachers in their classrooms.

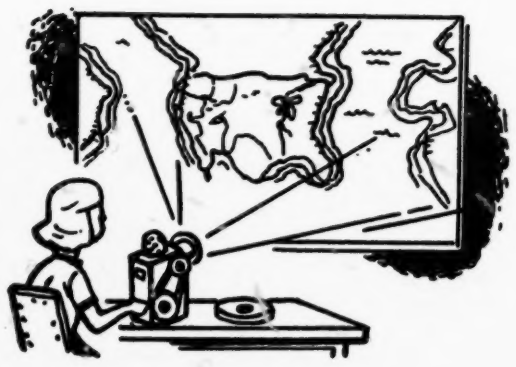
- It seems evident that the Triplet Project prepares the college senior for her first teaching assignment better than other student teaching experiences, by helping students to cope with the multi-faceted problems presented by children in disadvantaged neighborhoods. However, more effective training would occur:

1. if the supervisor were able to identify certain of the student's strengths and weaknesses through observation of his teaching performance prior to the student's student teaching semester either

in the junior or lower senior year.

2. if the student teaching experience were longer, perhaps spread out through the entire senior year, with some teaching taking place during the junior year in conjunction with methods courses.

3. if closed circuit television were to be made available for use in the school so that samples of teaching performance could be obtained for video tape replay. A recent M-STEP Monograph suggests a variety of ways in which these videotapes can be used in teacher training.[1]



[1]Howard E. Bosley and Harold E. Wigren, eds., Television and Related Media in Teacher Education (Baltimore: Multi-State Teacher Education Project, 1967).